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27 August 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Czech Crisis: Questions for Discussion

Although the full implications of the Czech events will probably remain obscure for some time, it does seem possible to formulate the main issues to which analytical effort should now be addressed. Among the following suggested questions, the first is the key one which will affect the answers to all the others.

I. Have the Soviet and Czech negotiations in Moscow at last found a formula which will be viable in the Czech party and among the Czech people? -- The communique issued this morning carries the same ambiguities which appeared in the Cierna and Bratislava documents. The Soviets retain a right to judge the conduct of the Czech leaders in implementing the generally conservative language agreed, but we are not told what particular measures the Czech leaders will now take to earn the Soviet trust. The things to watch for are: a) what personnel changes are made in organs of Party and Government; b) what measures are taken to control the communications media and non-party organizations; c) what arrangements are made for the continued presence of Soviet forces, perhaps under undertakings to "strengthen" Warsaw Pact defenses.

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If Dubcek stays, his problem will be to maintain the moral authority which until now has been his main strength. If this erodes because of words or measures he may have agreed to in Moscow, his power will slip away also, and the way will be open to a reconstituted leadership more to Soviet taste.

II. Will the events of the last week and the shakedown process now beginning in Prague bring ructions elsewhere in Eastern Europe? -- The place to watch in particular is Poland, where factional instability has been chronic. Also, much remains to be sorted out in relations with Rumania and Yugoslavia. Ultimately, the relations of the USSR to its Eastern European allies, and the structures -- the Warsaw Pact and CEMA -- which embody these relations, will probably undergo some change in consequence of the Czech events.

III. What changes may occur in the Soviet leadership in the wake of a crisis which must have shaken the Soviet Party deeply and led to new calculations by many about the survivability of certain leaders? -- Despite numerous rumors and the justified suspicion that events of this kind are bound to have consequences in the leadership, no hard indications of an impending shuffle are yet available. It may be that collectivity itself is some

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protection against radical shifts. In any case, in the interest of preserving the customary front of Party solidarity, time will probably be allowed to pass before consequences are drawn. The usual Kremlinological signs will bear close watching, especially personnel shifts at first among lesser figures.

IV. Will broader Soviet policies, especially the approach to relations with the US, be affected? -- Of necessity there will probably be some hardening of propaganda rhetoric for a time, but so far there are no serious signs that basic change will occur, rather the contrary. Such change would probably result only if things continued to go badly in Prague, or if new leadership emerged in Moscow. Obviously, the most important indicator will be the handling of the forthcoming arms control talks.

V. Will the Czech events give a further serious shove to the process of deterioration in the Communist movement, and therefore to Soviet pretensions to lead it and use it as an instrument of Soviet policy? -- Present indications clearly point this way unless some improbable miracle occurs in Soviet-Czech relations from this point on.

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VI. What broader implications can be drawn for the strength and efficacy of Soviet foreign policy in the West generally, and in certain key Third World countries, in the wake of the Czech events?

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